



Saint David's School

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Headmaster

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Dear Saint David's Community,

At its very essence, the school's mission can be synthesized into three short but powerful phrases: *Boys ... Balance ... Good Men*. Once again it will be this clarity of mission that will shepherd Saint David's School into our fifty-sixth year. The return of youthful voices to the hallways and classrooms of the school in just a few days will mark one of the most anticipated events in the perennial calendar. "School's in!" many say, can evoke the same deep emotional response in parents as "School's out!" can in the boys.

Saint David's is a school for *boys*, not girls, not boys and girls, just boys! This singular focus brings clarity of purpose, refinement of pedagogical skill and practice, and an extraordinary atmosphere. Our environment is conducive to learning for boys at an age and developmental stage where it is of utmost importance. It is during these early years that the seeds of future learning and growth are established. It is here that the lens through which the world is perceived is created and refined. Teaching boys is what we do.

The second phrase, *Balance*, forms the core tenet of our curriculum. At Saint David's this single word carries a depth of meaning. We see balance as the classic ancient Greek ideal of "balance in all things." Saint David's believes that central to boys' development is learning to balance the various aspects of their lives – the often competing forces of intellectual passion (scholarship), health and physical development (athletics), faith and morality (spirituality), recognition and appreciation of beauty (aesthetics); that it is through this balance that one can lead a good life as a good man.

Good men are our product. Good men are what we want our sons to aspire to be; it is through their academic, spiritual, athletic, and aesthetically balanced education that we believe our boys will form the solid foundations necessary to understand and appreciate the myriad pathways to manhood and a full life.

It is with this synthesis of the mission in mind that our underlying theme for this year is identified: *scholarship and spirituality*. Throughout this school-year, I encourage each of us to explore individually and as an educational community what spirituality means at Saint David's; how it's connected with scholarship; how it helps inform and shape the ethics and morals of good men. As I reflect upon spirituality and scholarship, I am reminded of the late fifteenth century English morality play, *Everyman*, performed brilliantly, I might add, by members of this year's graduating class in their seventh grade year. In the play, *Everyman*, the hero, called by Death, cannot persuade any of his friends – Beauty, Kindred, Worldly Goods, Five Wits – to accompany him. One of the last to refuse to go is Knowledge; and the only one to accept is Good Deeds. *Everyman* presents for us the somewhat grim reality that we can take with us from this world nothing that we have received; only what we have given. It also helps us understand that metaphorically "life is a precious possession," and that we must invest whatever talent or talents we may possess wisely – use them as we should use material goods – in a charitable way; for in the end it is only our good deeds that we have.

As I reflect on spirituality at Saint David's, I am also reminded of the incredible sense of community that we all experience and contribute to; the "family-like" atmosphere that defines this community. As much as I have written about "balance" above in the context of our four pillars, the glue that truly holds the school together is the heavily trodden bridges that join teacher and parent and child. Saint David's views the education of children as a joint process – parents, teachers and boys together. The evidence of this special balance has never been more clearly visible than of late. When members of the community have demonstrated need, whether as a result of illness or misfortune, the community has vigorously and selflessly stepped forward to fill the void, bridge the gap. This is a community that gives. Our actions speak volumes, and our boys are learning it. By taking some time this year to look a little more closely at spirituality and the role it plays at Saint David's, we have the opportunity to appreciate and celebrate another important aspect of what really makes this school such a unique and special place.

During the summer months several important physical and intellectual projects began or were completed at the school – the construction of a new music suite and a remodeled corner gym; preparation for a new web site, and a comprehensive synthesis of the year's curriculum work. Saint David's School is a thriving "hot cognitive economy"¹.

Central to this cognitive economy is the thinking that the faculty is doing regarding what is taught and when. As you may remember from prior letters, Saint David's embarked on a major curricular review process two years ago. Over these past summer months we began the third phase of this review. Curriculum Chairs synthesized the year's work of their individual committees. Scope and sequence of curriculum content in each of the core disciplines has been vertically organized from Pre-kindergarten through Eighth Grade. It is now ready for committees to critique. This school year each committee will carefully and thoughtfully critique the skills and content of their respective disciplines within the context of the school's mission, philosophy, and established school-wide goals. This is exciting work. The decisions regarding what we teach are the most important decisions we make. Creating an infrastructure where this professional curricular discourse occurs continuously and inclusively is at the core of great twenty-first century schools.

On the more physical side of summer work, during the past two years Saint David's has been preparing to convert two apartments adjacent to the school into instructional space. This summer the conversion occurred, and two fifth-floor apartments have been transformed into a new music suite. The suite consists of two large music rooms, a large practice room and office, a bathroom, and a hallway for gathering and practicing. The entire space has been sound attenuated to allow several different musical lessons or activities to occur simultaneously. The new music suite fulfills several important goals of the school. Firstly, by moving a music room from the street level into the school building proper, we have consolidated the music program, allowing more collaboration among its dedicated faculty. Secondly, a safer, more centralized educational experience for the boys has been created; thirdly, we have been able to construct within this suite an impressive computerized music lab, adding a new dimension to our music program.

The movement of the music room from the street level, upstairs to the fifth floor, has also allowed for the conversion of a portion of the corner gym to retail space. In addition to helping offset the cost of this new construction, retail space on the corner will clean up an otherwise dark corner and bring it back to a former glory. The Corner Gymnasium has been pushed back from the Madison Avenue corner, deeper into the building, occupying much of its original space and all of the old music room space. The entire summer project has resulted in an overall increase in instructional space of approximately 2,400 sq. ft.

In addition to these obvious physical changes and the curriculum work already mentioned, strategic planning has also been at the forefront of the school's thinking. Excellent teachers who share in the values and traditions of the school, who are fully dedicated to its mission's success in an increasingly competitive marketplace, are teachers the school must now work harder to attract and keep. The school has recognized this goal as one of its most important strategic initiatives. This year, after two years' preparation, Saint David's has

implemented the first phase of a comprehensive compensation program that will unfold over the next two years, bringing Saint David's faculty salaries into a highly competitive position. The school also recognizes that this initiative is now an ongoing strategic issue that will need to be readdressed constantly as one major component of a much broader overall strategic plan. As part of this broader strategic planning process, the school is now identifying and examining other components that may be important in advancing the school's mission in both the short and long term.

In concert with the faculty initiative, the school will also embark this year on a full critique of the supervision and evaluation program for faculty and staff. The school believes that the best programs of supervision and evaluation recognize, celebrate, reward, and invest in the professional growth and development of its people. A joint committee, formed last spring, will spend this year developing the new program.

During this school-year, Saint David's will also be preparing for its Five Year Review by the New York State Association of Independent Schools. During the fall of 2007, Saint David's will be visited by a small accreditation committee from NYSAIS. After our successful accreditation visit by the full committee in the fall of 2002, the Five Year Review is designed to follow-up on recommendations and commendations made by the 2002 Visiting Committee. We are excited about the opportunity to share the strength of our school and the progress we have made in the five years since accreditation.

Our 2006-2007 school year is certainly shaping up to be a busy and fruitful year. Saint David's, with clarity of mission and focused resolve is an exciting place to work and learn. We eagerly await the return of the boys. I remain,

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

P. David O'Halloran

¹. The term "hot cognitive economy" is one used by David Perkins in his book Smart Schools: Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child. 1992. Free Press, New York. Perkins argues that if we want to attain the three critical achievements in school of retention, understanding, and the active use of knowledge, a classroom environment that sustains high energy and complex cognition is necessary, i.e. "a hot cognitive economy".